



SESSION 3: Ordinary People Extraordinary Purpose

God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:28-29

SETTING THE SCENE

We first meet Clarence, an otherwise ordinary old man, standing behind George as he comes to the bridge on that fateful Christmas Eve. And before George can make his life-or-death decision,

Clarence jumps into the icy river. He jumps in because he knows help himself but to rescue him. The scene then cuts to tollhouse where the tollhouse keeper helps Clarence and up and dry out. His eyes open wide then narrow in the peculiar figure beside the fire. In perhaps the fun of the movie, Clarence gradually reveals his heavenly deadpan honesty. And with each new revelation the tollhouse keeper halts his spit-take of tobacco juice, react unforgettable double-takes and befuddled stares until he rom his chair and runs out the door, never to be seen again.

uncredited role, the actor Tom Fadden played the tollhouse Getting his first break decades before in vaudeville, he is the most prolific movie actor you've never heard of. He long career out of uncredited roles like this one, perfecting spit-takes, double-takes, and befuddled stares of average Joes country bumpkins for over 60 years.

I bring it up because, in the gospel accounts of Jesus Christ, it was ordinary people—average Joes and country bumpkins—who witnessed firsthand the marvelous goodness that made the good news •ood- It was that way from the very beginning, with shepherds who ing watch over their flocks by night. The third candle on Zhe Advent wreath is often called the "shepherd's candle," in memory of those sheep-herders who first heard and saw and beheld the thing happening among ordinary people in the most ordinary of places.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 1:22-31. Try to recall the first time someone talked with you about Jesus. Who was it?

An opportunity for personal reflection

What do you remember best about that person? *An opportunity for personal reflection*

2. Can you think of a biblical image or character that embodies the "foolishness" of God? How about in It's a Wonderful Life? What qualities or actions do you see there?

One example would be the father in the parable of the lost son (Like 15:11-32). He loved his child(ren) so much he is willing to look like a (holy) fool in the eyes of his neighbors to welcome back the very one who squandered his wealth.

3. When have you seen God choose what is foolish, weak, low, or despised in the world around you? What was the result?

An opportunity for personal reflection

4. What is the most foolish or the weakest aspect of your life? What is the lowest or most despised part of your community? How might God be at work in these things?

An opportunity for personal reflection

5. Read Luke 2:8-15. We sometimes think of these shepherds as despised outcasts, but in first-century Palestine, they were likely thought of as just ordinary, "blue collar" folk doing necessary, if not desirable, work. To keep watch at night often fell to hired hands who were protecting the sheepfold from predators. What might be a contemporary equivalent to "shepherds" today? Who in your life might fit this description?

An opportunity for personal reflection

6. As best as you can, look for other references to shepherds in the Bible. What else can we learn from the various images of shepherds in the Bible?

Think especially of Psalm 23 and how Jesus speaks about himself in John 10

7. Based on the shepherds' reaction, how do you imagine "the glory of the Lord" appeared or what did it feel like?

An opportunity for personal reflection. Try to use as many senses as possible. Think of how the glory of the Lord is described else where in Scripture. (ex. Isaiah 64)

8. How would you track the progress of their reactions and what emotions they were experiencing?

An opportunity for personal reflection. But the basic trajectory is from terror to peace.

9. Can you relate an experience where God has taken you from terror to joy? An opportunity for personal reflection

10. Read Psalm 32:1-5, 10-11 and Psalm 97: 1-5, 10-12. What is the ultimate source of joy? How do you define "joy"? How do you know when you have it?

The core truth worth reflecting on here is that joy is a gift of God that doesn't depend on circumstances. It is broader and deeper than our everyday sense of happiness which ebbs and flows. It is a kind of irresistible contentment. It arises from God's never ending grace mercy and love most fully realize in forgiveness and reconciliation.

CLOSING PRAYER

We glorify you, O Lord, for choosing ordinary people like us to be a part of your family and for showing us what it means to be a humble servant in this world. May we never think too highly of ourselves, but always laud you with highest praise for so richly filling our lives with good things from you. Amen.